

Chaska, Minnesota Takes Plan 9 to Camp

Ingredients for a successful emergency preparedness teaching moment:

- One bright, sunny day
- One city park pavilion
- 120 kids at summer camp
- One creative and energetic public health staff member named Deb Larsen

Mix well, and enjoy. It's the Plan 9 Board Game!

Deb Larsen is the program coordinator of Medical Reserve Corps of Carver County, MN and the data specialist for Emergency Preparedness at Carver County Public Health & Environment. Last summer, she was given the task of educating 120 third- and fourth-graders about emergency preparedness at the City of Chaska's popular two-day summer safety camp.

Larsen's goal was to create a program that volunteers from MRC or the Minnesota Health Occupations Students of America (MN-HOSA) could "put together and go." Ideally it had to be something that would engage the kids and send them off as young champions of emergency preparedness.

Fortunately, for Larsen, the county's Public Health Emergency Preparedness Planner, Vina Marquart, had been to the Public Health Preparedness Summit in February 2011. There she heard a presentation by NACCHO about the Advanced Practice Centers for Emergency Preparedness (APC). The APC program has produced more than a hundred resources for emergency preparedness programs including teaching resources for every level of the community. She passed along this resource to Larsen.

"The minute I saw it I was hooked," says Larsen. She was referring to the Montgomery County APC's video *Marta the Planner*, which is among the many resources available on NACCHO's APC website. www.NACCHO.org/APC "She (Marta) is such a role model for how you can get a message out in a short amount of time with clarity, visuals and humor."

Marta the Planner is part of a campaign called Plan to be Safe, which includes posters, flyers, and brochures—all with the theme "Plan 9," or the nine essential items for any emergency preparedness kit. With bold, simple images and bright colors, Plan 9 was just the ticket for the kids in Chaska's summer safety camp. "It easily takes the preparedness message down to kid level," says Larsen.

Carver County, population 91,000, is located southwest of the Twin Cities of Minneapolis/St. Paul. Its largest city, Chaska, runs a summer safety camp program drawing children from all over the primarily rural county. Most of the population is English-speaking, but there are a growing number of Spanish-speakers in the County. "I knew there was some chance of having Spanish speaking students," says Larsen, "so visuals were needed."

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Here is the recipe Larsen followed to creating the **Plan 9 Board Game**:

Step 1: Take Plan 9 from the NACCHO Toolbox, and, using the directions provided, turn the image on its side, landscape fashion. Move images to the right, leaving white space on the left. Now the poster resembles a rectangular board game, with a beginning and an end.

Step 2: Make up an emergency kit containing multiples of the Plan 9 essential items. Get a roomy, big blue bag, buy a gallon jug of water, a good hand-crank radio (don't skimp on this), canned food, can opener, and so on, until you have completed the list.

Step 3: Laminate five 11" x 17" game boards (so they can't be ruined by little hands.)

Step 4: Get adhesive foam numbers – 1 through 9—from the hobby store, and place a colored number on each item.

Step 5: On the day of the summer camp, place the 9 items on a table up front along with the blue bag. Tell children: "The big blue bag is your emergency supply kit. The items on the Plan 9 game board go in the big blue bag."

To play the game, gather kids around each table hosted by one teacher. Have teachers begin by telling their group about emergencies likely to happen in their area such as tornadoes, floods, and power outages. Then explain that putting together an emergency supply kit is something children and parents can do together to help prepare.

Tell each child to go up to the front table, take an item, and place it on the Plan 9 game board. Children can recognize the items in three ways: by the teacher's description, by the game board picture, or by the item number. (All learning styles will be covered.) Kids succeed!

Give each child a mini Plan 9 Make A Kit poster to take home. Tell kids, "Go make your own emergency kit!"

According to Larsen, the whole activity takes about 20 – 25 minutes. "We repeated the session six times, rotating 120 children through the game," she says. "In between, the MRC and MN-HOSA volunteer teachers and I would debrief about what worked and what didn't. We would adopt everyone's best practices into the next round of games. This re-energized the teachers too."

"We heard, anecdotally from parents, that many kids came home and shared Plan 9," says Larsen. "They wanted to get started making the kit right away!"

"The best part of the board game is that it packs up so well," Larsen says. "Even if you have to

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haul it out in short order, if you spend a little time reorganizing it afterward an event, it's ready to go—or share with other volunteers who will do outreach. I used a big plastic tub for our games. I taped supply lists and game directions right on the inside of the tub. The curriculum is a simple message that kids pick up on in a snap. The sturdy, flat placemats travel and hold up well. When you work in public health you learn fast—there's a lot of hauling and you have to do it yourself. Plan 9 helped us keep it simple and easy.”

Carver County’s MRC team did make one special addition to Plan 9 just for kids. When the 9 items had been assembled in the big blue bag, teachers asked, “Can anyone guess what else we need to put in the kit just for you?” The answer, of course, is, “Toys!” Larsen included in each kit a flattened beach ball and a puzzle. “A little beach ball is the perfect activity toy. It is light weight, it packs well, and it won’t do any damage when kids play with it indoors,” she says. “The puzzle is the perfect quiet toy. It’s flat and takes up hardly any room in the kit.”

“During an actual emergency, decision-making is challenging for the head of household,” says Larsen. “If this essential supply kit is prepared in advance and stored in the home, decisions are easier to make knowing that essential supplies are at hand. Stress may be lessened. The family is more resilient. Kids may feel safer. That’s our goal with the Plan 9 board game. These campers with their enthusiasm are the up and coming champions of emergency preparedness .”